

# Teaching international students: How do we integrate their international experiences?

Arvidsson, S

**Abstract—** The growing proportion of international students at our Swedish universities is an undisputable fact. The effects of this trend have primarily been examined from a challenge perspective. In this paper, we return to the expectations that were emphasised with the introduction of the Bologna process, i.e. that this would enable an integration of students' international experiences in our courses and programmes. This paper sets out to explore the actual status of this quest. We do so by posing the following two research questions: First, *do we integrate our students' international experiences?* Second, *how do we integrate our students' international experiences?* The study is based on a questionnaire directed to course leaders at Lund University School of Economics and Management.

## I. INTRODUCTION

WHEN the Bologna Process was launched with the Bologna Declaration, of 1999, an expected and also aimed at outcome was to increase the number of international students in Swedish universities. In the debate, it was stressed that the Bologna Process would enhance the international character of our Swedish university teaching. With an increasing number of international students, we would be presented by plenty of opportunities to integrate their international experiences in our courses and programmes. There was a unison agreement that this was something desirable.

Today, almost 20 years after the Bologna Process, teaching at Swedish universities means that you often have an international student group in front of you. At many universities, the number of nationalities increases from one year to the next (Cao et al. 2014). Thus, we appear to have reached the outcome we aimed for. However, what has happened with the integration of our students' international experiences? Nowadays, the debate appears primarily to focus on how to deal with challenges related to teaching international students (Andrade, 2010; Bolton and Kuteeva, 2012; Brevetti and Ford, 2017; Mohd Faiz et al, 2017). Language problems, differences in studying techniques and pre-knowledge are often highlighted as underpinning these challenges.

However, this paper sets out to explore the actual status of the quest to integrate students' international experiences. We do so by posing the following two research questions: First, *do we integrate our students' international experiences?* Second, *how do we integrate our students'*

international experiences? The study is based on a questionnaire directed to course leaders at Lund University School of Economics and Management. The preliminary findings from the pre-study reveal mixed results and show different levels, types and focus of integration. In the quest of enhancing the international profile of Swedish universities, the findings provide relevant insights to the discussion of how we should develop an effective integration of our students' international experiences.

The remain of the paper is structured as follows: First, a theoretical and empirical foundation is presented. Then, the underlying methodology and research design are at focus. Thereafter, the results are presented and discussed. The paper closes with some concluding remarks.

## II. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION

The proportion of international students in our universities grows not only in Sweden. Today, it is regarded a global phenomenon (see e.g. (Cao et al. 2014). Driving this trend is obviously the intensified internalization. In academic literature, there is an increasing focus on examining the growth of international students from various perspectives. Often these studies adopt a *challenge perspective*: The challenge perspective has been related to the *teaching situation* (see e.g. Teekens, 2003), i.e. What challenges do a greater proportion of international students give rise to for the teaching situation? The challenge perspective has also been related to the *international students* per se, i.e. What challenges do international students encounter during their transition? In relation to this, there has been a focus in the debate on methods and techniques that faculty could *provide* international students with in order for them to come to terms with these challenges (Mohd Faiz et al, 2017). A well-researched challenge is related to low English proficiency (Andrade, 2010; Bolton and Kuteeva, 2012; Mohd Faiz et al, 2017). Focus has also been directed towards the fact that international students are exposed to a new cultural context and towards the challenges that this might give rise to (see Brevetti and Ford, 2017).

In this paper, the challenge perspective is obviously present but the main focus is to go beyond these challenges and examine if and how we succeed in integrating the students' international experiences. We do not approach this from the student perspective but from the faculty perspective. In the research community there is argued to be a lack of examining the effects of a greater proportion of international students from a *faculty* perspective (Cao et al. 2014). In their comprehensive questionnaire study, Cao et al. (2014) find that faculty's *attitudes* toward

internationalization and international students have significant effect on their teaching practices with international students. The findings also show that the students' enhanced learning outcomes can raise the level of faculty satisfaction in teaching international students and their overall engagement in pursuing this *internationalization initiative*. These findings merit further research.

### III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this section, the methodology and research design underlying the study are accounted for. The section starts with arguing for the research method. Then, follows a presentation of how the pre-study and questionnaire-study were designed.

#### A. Research method

In this study, a survey research design is used to analyse if and how students' international experiences are integrated in our courses and programmes. This methodology was chosen since the objective of the study is to obtain an overall picture of course leaders' views on different aspects related to this process.

#### B. Pre-study

In order to enhance the quality of the questionnaire, it was decided to conduct a pre-study. The aim of this pre-study was to explore areas and questions relevant for inclusion in the questionnaire study. The pre-study was structured as informal discussions with three colleagues responsible of courses with international students (including both bachelor and master level). The colleagues were presented with the objective of present project and the plan to conduct a questionnaire study focused on if and how we integrate our students' international experiences. Although, the pre-study revealed different levels, types and focus of integration there were some general findings: 1) an agreement of the importance to integrate students' international experiences, 2) a shared notion that this integration is not given enough focus in their courses, and that this primarily is due to 3) a number of challenges related to teaching international students (low proficiency in English, differences in studying techniques and pre-knowledge of topics and pedagogical techniques).

#### C. Questionnaire study

In the following sections, the construction of the questionnaire and the selection of respondents are presented.

##### 1) Construction of questionnaire

The findings from the pre-study provided valuable input in the next stage, i.e. the construction of the questionnaire. The questionnaire includes two parts. In the *first part*, the respondent was asked to give 1) some information related to his/her experience of teaching in general and teaching international students in specific (years, levels, areas etc.) and 2) some information related to the course (level, credits, area, proportion of international students etc.). In the *second part*, the respondent was asked to indicate if different pedagogical techniques (individual assignments, group assignments, cases, presentations, seminars, calculations) were used (yes/no). Then the respondent were asked to

assess to what extent these pedagogical techniques were designed to integrate the students' international experiences (low extent, medium extent, high extent). The respondent was also asked to elaborate on and exemplify how he/she integrated the students' international experiences with the help of these techniques. Finally, the respondent was asked to argue for how they believed that students' international experiences most efficiently could be integrated in courses and programmes. Here the respondents were asked to be creative and not reflect too much on course constraints. In the third part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to elaborate on their view of the present integration of students' international experiences. These questions focused on Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, i.e. a SWOT-analysis.

##### 2) Respondents

The questionnaire was directed to course leaders at Lund University School of Economics and Management. A prerequisite for being selected as respondent was that he/she was responsible for a course in which international students were included. In reality this meant that only teachers responsible for courses given in English on Bachelor and Master level were included as respondents. For obvious reasons, teachers responsible for courses given in Swedish were not included as respondents. A decision was made to not only include teachers responsible for courses but also those responsible for whole *programmes*, i.e. master programmes and LUSEM International Business Bachelor.

TABLE I  
RESPONDENTS

Number of respondents	Respondent responsible for	Average proportion of international students
X	Bachelor course	X per cent
X	Master course	X per cent
X	Bachelor programme	X per cent
X	Master programme	X per cent

This decision was motivated by a notion that those responsible for whole programmes might have a more comprehensive idea (read: learning outcomes) of how students' international experiences were expected to be integrated in the programme through course structures and pedagogical techniques. In TABLE 1, some information related to the respondents are included (Note: TABLE 1 is not complete in this version of the paper). Appendix 1 includes a list of which courses and programmes the respondents are responsible for. (Note: Appendix not included in this version of the paper).

### IV. RESULTS

[To be included]

### V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

[To be included]

### REFERENCES

- [1] Andrade, M. S. (2010). Increasing accountability: Faculty perspectives on the English language of normative English speakers. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 14(3), 221-239.
- [2] Bolton, K., & Kuteeva, M. (2012). English as an academic language at a Swedish university: Parallel language use and the "threat" of

- English. *Journal o f Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 35(5), 429^147.
- [3] Brevetti, M., & Ford, D. (2017). Debates on the international student experience: schools as a morally formative culture. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, 11(3), 189-193.
- [4] Cao, Y., Li, X., Jiang, A., & Bai, K. (2014). Motivators and outcomes of faculty actions towards international students: Under the influence of internationalization. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 3(4), 49.
- [5] Mohd Faiz, N. S., Awang, H., & Maziana, M. (2017). Narrowing Communication Gaps in Teaching International Students. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*.
- [6] Teekens, H. (2003). The requirement to develop specific skills for teaching in an intercultural setting. *Journal o f Studies in International Education*, 7(1), 108-119.